

A COLORING BOOK OF THE OLYMPICS



& OTHER ANCIENT GAMES

Οὐ μὲν γὰρ μεῖζον κλέος ἀνέρος ὄφρα κεν ἦσιν
ἢ ὅτι ποσσὶν τε ῥέξηι καὶ χερσὶν ἐῆσιν

Odyssey VIII, 147-8



AGON, GOD OF COMPETITION

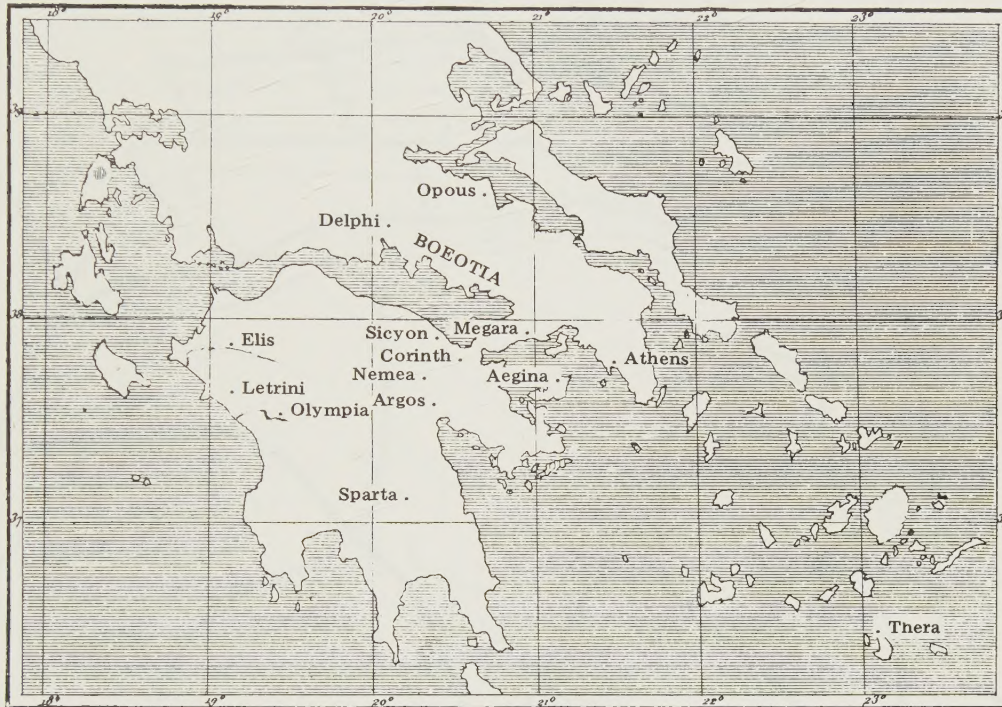
From a tetradrachm from Skopelos, c. 500 B.C.

Cover: runners in the stade-race from a Panathenaic amphora by the Euphiletos painter, c. 520 B.C. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund

THE OLYMPICS

By E. Knill

Drawings from ancient vases, &c., by N. Conkle



Dear Cousin Nikosthenes,

78th Olympiad [468 B.C.]

We were very sorry to hear about your father's illness, and that you can't go to Olympia for the games in honor of Zeus. But I won't talk any more about it, or we will both feel worse. My father has asked me to write to you about the games (secretly, I think that he wants an excuse for me to practice writing because he wants us all to be able to write our own letters and not have to rely on slaves). But even if he hadn't asked me, I wanted to tell you what happens so you'll know what to expect if you compete in the next Olympiad. I know you'll be twenty-one in four years, so you won't be in the boys' class any more, but at least I can tell you what it is like to compete against other boys, and everything else that happens. A runner is standing by now to take this letter to the harbor before the ship sails, so I will finish for now.

Your Cousin,

Lykophron

Dear Cousin Nikosthenes,

We left Athens before dawn. My father and Uncle Timotheos, who as you know has been training me for the last ten months, started for Piraeus with two slaves, and of course with me, two days before most of the rest of the athletes from Athens. Eirene, my sister (who sends you her greetings), wanted very badly to go too, but it seemed impossible. My father and uncle would be too busy with me and with their duties as representatives of Athens to look after



From a black-figure hydria, late 6th century B.C., Vatican Museum

her. And besides, what could she do during the thirty days I was training at Elis? It was out of the question to bring a married woman servant to be with her, for only maidens are allowed at the sanctuary of Zeus at Olympia, and there is no unmarried woman in our household. She tried to hold back her tears as she saw us go, but I know she was very sad. Perhaps she will be allowed to run in the next race in honor of Hera at Olympia. I think it is next year, or the following. Then she will have a chance to win the victor's olive wreath, just as



men do in the games for Zeus. Girls get even more, for they also win part of the cow which is sacrificed to Hera. Eirene is very fast (she has almost beaten me once or twice), so I will try to talk my father into letting her run.

Our boat left Piraeus with the early tide, and in just a few hours we had landed at Kenchreai. That night we stayed with a guest-friend of my father's at Corinth, in a house luxurious beyond belief. The next morning we boarded another ship, a larger one, with two groups of athletes from Corinth. One was Aristandridas, who won the boys' stade-race at the last Olympiad. I'm very glad not to be running against him! The winds were not steady, so it was the afternoon of the third day when we finally came to the mouth of the Peneios River. The city of Elis (if you want to call it that; it is still being built, and hardly anything is completed) is several hours from the sea. We didn't want to risk getting caught in the river after dark, so we stayed on the boat and went up the river the next morning.

There were two days before the start of the official training period, but would Uncle Timotheos let me rest? Never! From dawn he had me exercising, running, exercising. It was almost a relief to hear that the Greek Judges were to begin examining the contestants. Everyone had to go before the Greek Judges and swear that he was of free Greek parentage and that he hadn't committed any crimes. When I stood before them I was rather scared, and I spoke quietly. Suddenly one, an old man, reached out with his flogging-branch, tapped me smartly on the legs and said, "Speak up, lad, speak up!" I was so startled that for a moment I couldn't say anything, but then I shouted, "I am Lykophron, son of Cleophron of Athens, seventeen years old."



That seemed to make him happy. One of the Greek Judges knew my father, so they didn't ask any more questions. But two boys just behind me were really grilled about their ages. One brought his trainer, who had won the crown sixteen years before, and the trainer swore that the boy was no more than eighteen years old (I thought he looked twenty). Another boy, Pherias of Aegina, was barred from the boys' wrestling because the judges did not think that he was yet twelve years old.

Every morning, after the sacrifice to Zeus, the Greek Judges set us to exercise. So far, I know of five who have dropped from the competition — two by choice, two when the judges told them that they were not good enough to compete, and one for breaking the rules. Soon, it will be too late to drop out, even if one wants to; once we have sworn the oath to Zeus, we must continue, come what may. They say that the other games are not so strict, but the judges keep telling us that the honor of competing at Olympia is almost as great as that of winning elsewhere. Well, they may be right, but if they don't feed us better, I may not be alive to compete — cheese, figs, and a bit of bread and porridge are all they allow. Uncle Timotheos was talking to a man from Tarentum who said that the latest thing there is for athletes to eat only meat, but the judges here will never allow that, I think.

The people of Elis are building a gymnasium and a palaestra for Olympic competitors to practice in, but they aren't finished yet, so we have been using the market-place, which has been cleared of all merchants while we are here. They have planted trees in a long row, and in twelve years I think there will be cool places to stand, but now it's hot and dusty. Still, everyone who has been to Olympia says that this is good practice for the heat and dust there. Tomorrow we leave for Olympia, but I don't know of anyone who will be able to take a letter to you until after the games, so I will continue this later.

We left Elis for Olympia early in the morning, just as the roosters were starting to quiet down. The Greek Judges led the way, along the river to the coast, and from there along the coast to the river Alpheius. We stopped at the fountain Piera, where the judges first sacrificed a pig and then were showered with water from the fountain. After that they put on their purple robes (even though they have officially been judges for the past ten months, they weren't *really* judges until this sacrifice). We stayed at Letrini overnight. By the time we got into Olympia the next afternoon, it seemed as though everyone else had already arrived. The river was covered with boats and barges (the most splendid, I thought, even though my father said they were too gaudy, were the barges of the tyrant of Syracuse, Hieron), and all the land beyond the sanctuary was covered with tents. Our two slaves had gone on two days ahead of us and found us a spot not too far from a spring, so we didn't have a long way to go for water. My father is one of the official representatives of Athens, and he spent all evening going around to greet old friends and former allies from the war against the Persians.





Uncle Timotheos took me to see the treasure-houses, where the people of Gela and Megara and Syracuse and such places store money and wonderful objects under the god's protection. I especially wanted to see the golden-handled sword of Pelops in the treasure-house of Sicyon, but a ceremony was taking place in front and no one was permitted inside. We passed statues of victors in earlier games, many with fresh wreaths of olive on their heads, put there by their families or men from their cities. I don't imagine that these wreaths came from the sacred olive from which the victors' wreaths are cut, but from other trees around it in the grove. They say that Heracles himself brought the olive tree to Olympia.

Early the next morning father, Uncle Timotheos and I sacrificed honey-cakes to Athena, and also to Zeus. Soon after sun-up the competitors began to gather in front of the statue of Zeus, God of Oaths, near the council-house. He stands tall and fierce, with thunderbolts in both hands, ready to strike down anyone who may break his oath. The Greek Judges were there, and all the priests, and the priestess of Demeter Chamyne, the only married woman who is allowed, under penalty of death. Suddenly the trumpet blared out, and the herald began his announcements. I recognized the first herald as the one who came to Athens three months ago, to announce the beginning of the sacred truce. The priest of Zeus sacrificed a boar, and then each athlete was announced by name and city. Once more, this time over the sacred boar, each athlete and his trainer and father or perhaps his brother swore the oath to use no unfair means to gain victory. Then, as we had at Elis, we all swore that we had been training for ten months and had committed no crimes. Finally, the judges swore that they would give honest judgements. The boxers, wrestlers and pankratiasts all drew lots for their first opponents. A scribe sat to one side of the judges; when all the names were given and all the oaths taken, a large white board was raised near the statue of Zeus. All the contests were listed, and the names of the contestants were written below.

As soon as I had gotten close enough to the list to see that my name was on it, Uncle Timotheos dragged me off to our tent, where he wanted me to eat just a little, then rest for a short time before the stade race began. I couldn't eat anything, and the tent was so hot, even with the sides rolled up, that it was impossible to lie there. Finally it was time to start. Father and Uncle Timotheos and I headed towards the stadium, and Mikron followed carrying the oil flask and a jar of water. A good crowd had gathered when we got to the stadium. The judges in charge were checking their list of contestants, and one was checking the sherds to be sure that the letters on them corresponded with the number of heats. After we had sacrificed to Zeus at the altar at the end of the stadium, the judges put the sherds into a bronze urn, and each of us picked one. Mine said B, so I was in the second heat. The judges made their way through the crowd to their stand, part-way along the side of the stadium, and I gave my clothes to Mikron and he oiled me down. The first group of runners was lining up on the starting line, behind the starting bars. There were a few seconds of silence after the trumpet blew, and then the herald's cry "GO" rang out, the starting bars dropped down, and they were off. In what seemed like no time at all, they had reached the end, and Dion of Ephesus had won. The herald called four more names, including mine. The dust along the track was just dying down from the first race, and it squeaked between my toes as I



From a red-figure kylix by the Penthesilea painter, c. 460 B.C. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

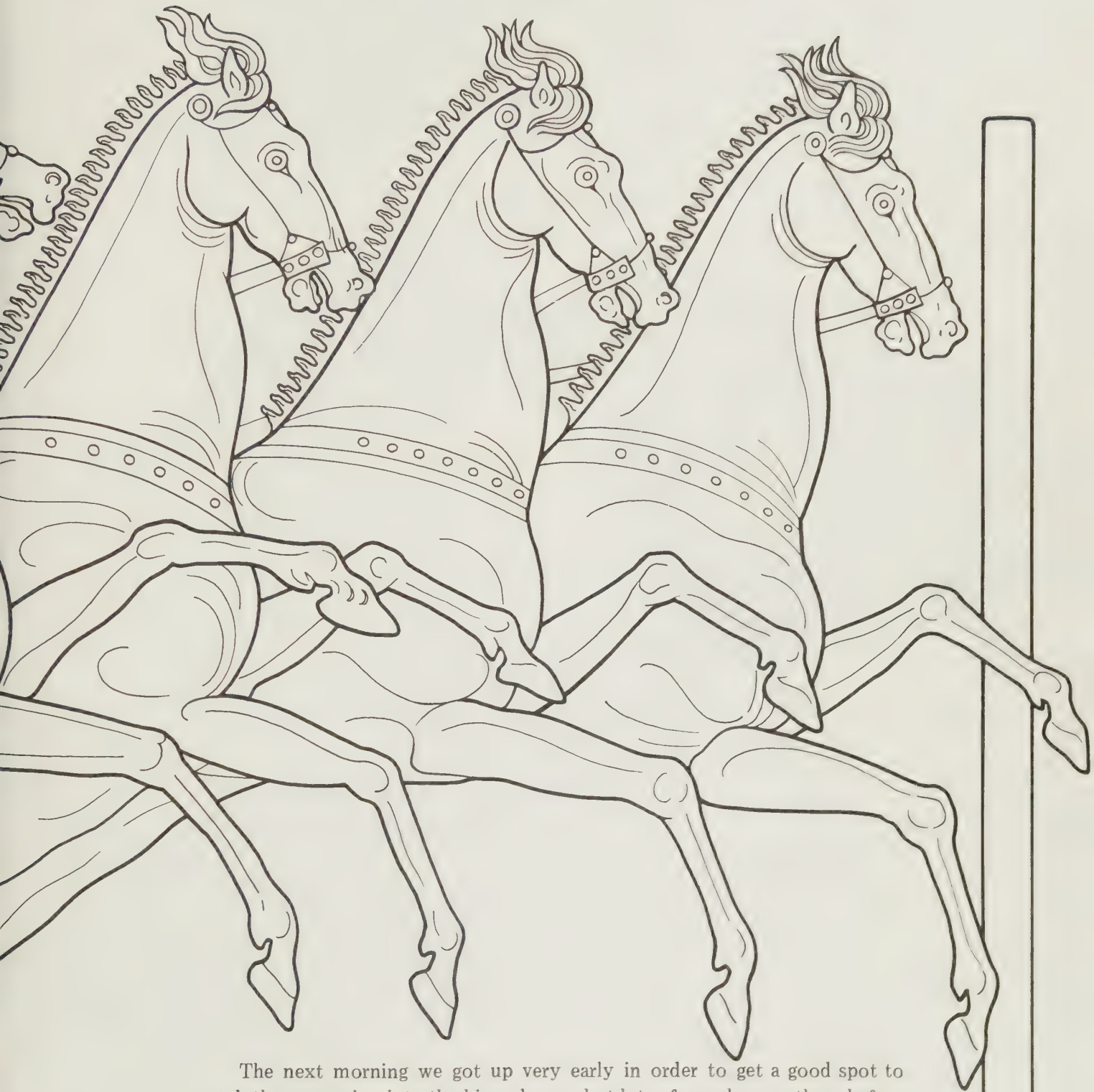
walked up to the starting line. Again the trumpet blew, and the herald shouted, "GO." I had intended to keep the blue top of my finishing post in sight at all times, so that I would run straight towards it and not waste a step, but as soon as the race started, everything was a blur. The four of us were even for the first half, then slowly, too slowly, I began to edge out in front. When we reached the finishing posts, I was ahead by almost the space of three heads. Uncle Timotheos and father came up to congratulate me, and we walked back along the track as the next race was starting to form. Thanks to Zeus that mine was the second heat, not the last before the final race. The sun blazed down upon us, and I was grateful that Mikron had carried a jar of water, for there is very little to be found near the stadium, and what there is is hot and dusty. The fourth heat was over, then the fifth — there were only two runners in that one — and the herald began to call the names of the finalists. I said a short prayer to Athena, and one to Zeus, for these are his games, and headed for the starting line. Of the five finalists, two worried me, Dion of Ephesus, who was young, perhaps only thirteen, but very fast, and Lampsachus of Keos, who won the boy's stade race at Nemea last year. We stood at the starting line; I was at one end, in the shadow of the scourge-bearer, whose task it was to flog anyone who made a false start. That made me more nervous, of course, but somehow I managed to avoid stumbling ahead of the rest. Then we were off. I had a great desire to look to the side, in spite of Uncle Timotheos' instructions, repeated again and again, "Look only ahead at the finishing post, never to the side." Before I knew it (not truly, of course, for we know that the stade-race is 600 feet long) I was at the finishing post, and, from the shouts of the crowd, knew that I had won. After I caught my breath (which seemed to take longer than the race itself) I walked back along the stadium to the judges' stand, while the crowd pelted me with flowers and laurel leaves. The herald called my name again, and one of the Greek Judges circled my head with a red woolen band. Six men from Athens made their way through the crowd and lifted me up on their shoulders, while many in the crowd called my name. Even now my spine tingles when I think of how happy I was. For the next two hours I was so busy receiving congratulations that I couldn't really pay attention to the boys' wrestling or boxing. Hierodemos of Parrhasia won the wrestling, and Diogenes of Tiryns won the boxing. If you had been wrestling, of course, I would have managed to watch, but I hope to watch you next Olympiad, in the men's wrestling.

The crowd broke up, some to go to their tents, others, like father, Uncle Timotheos and myself, to make thank-offerings to Zeus and Athena or other gods. That night we had a victory celebration in our tent, or should I say mostly outside it, for only half of the guests fit under the roof. The fires were kept smoky to ward off bugs, but they were only partly successful. Song after song was sung, toast after toast drunk, until far into the night.



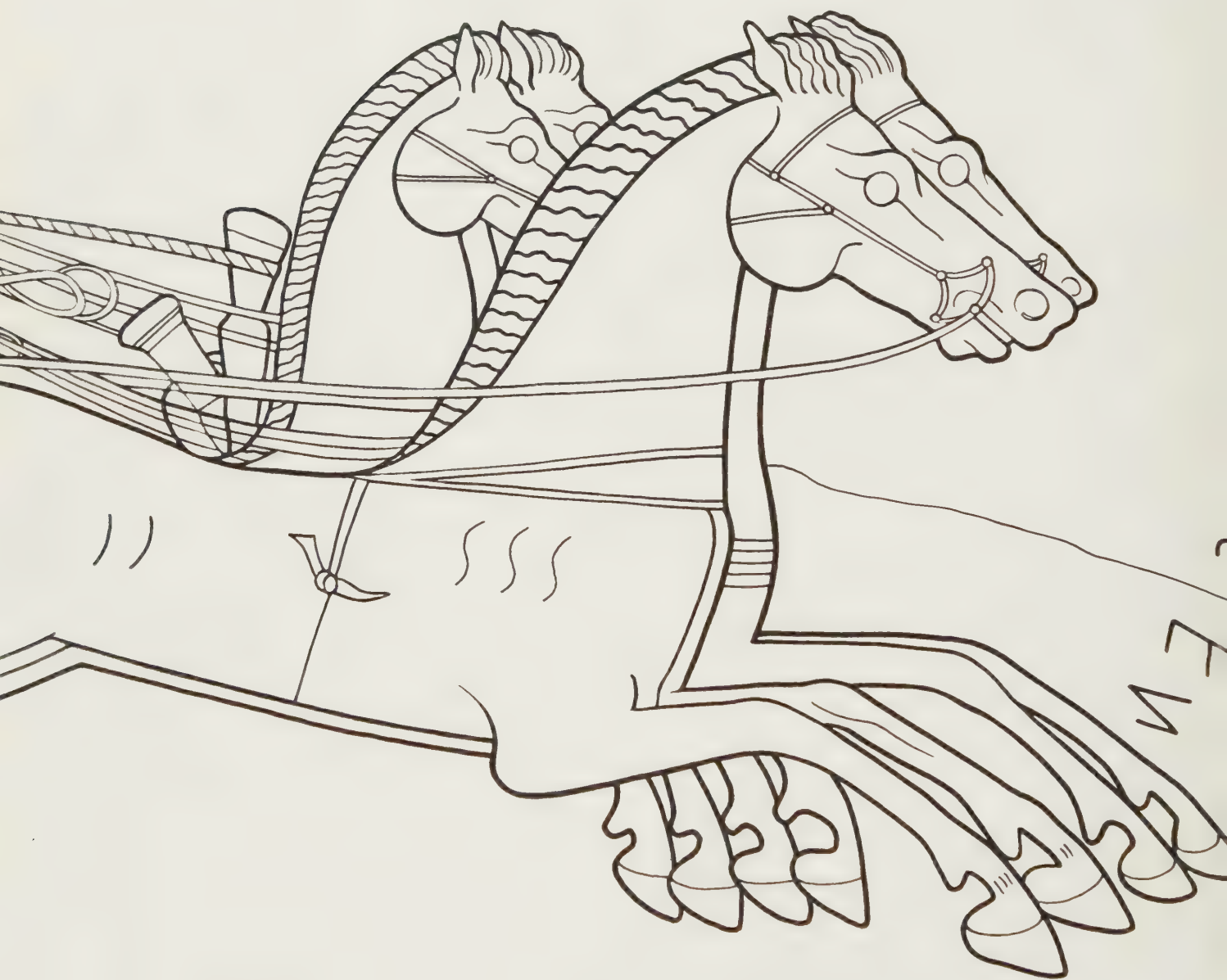




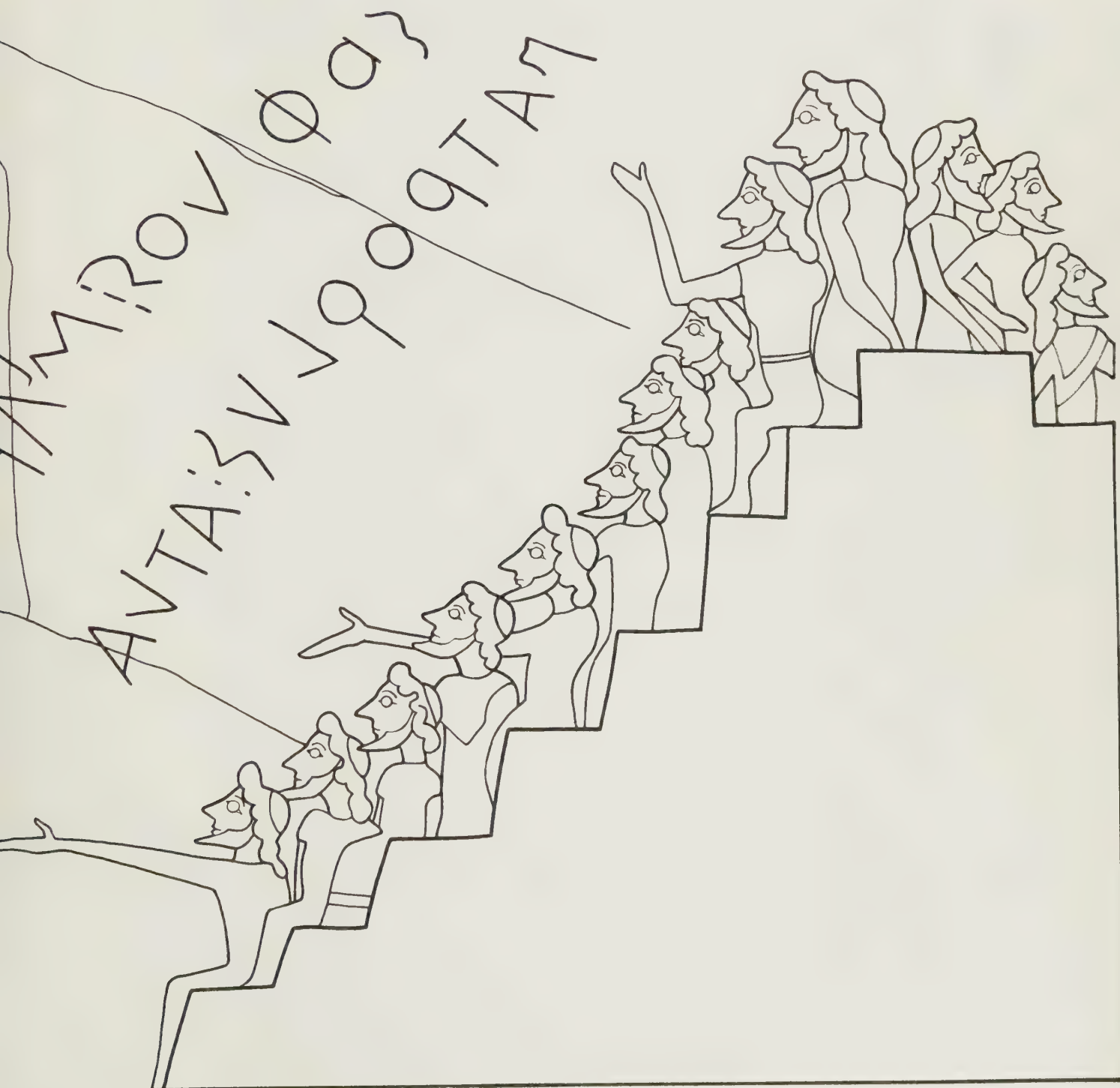


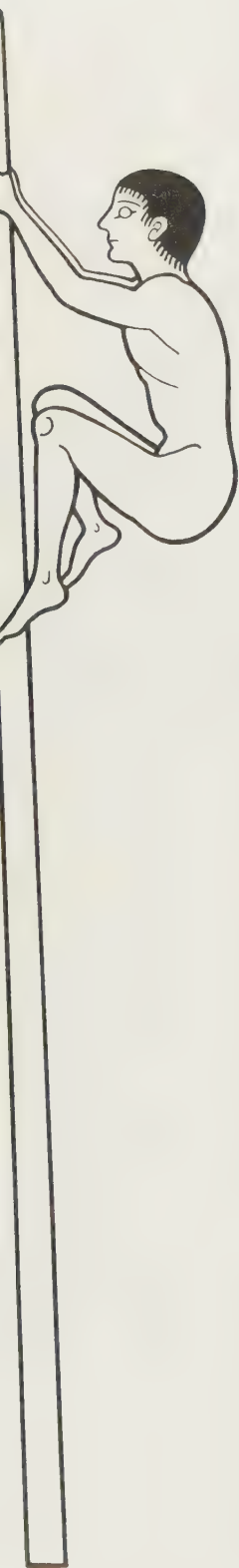
The next morning we got up very early in order to get a good spot to watch the procession into the hippodrome, but lots of people were there before we were. Luckily, Uncle Timotheos had thought to have our servant bring some small square logs to stand on, so we could see quite well. I wish you had seen the procession! The horses were perfectly splendid, the chariots sparkling. The Greek Judges in their purple robes looked very — well, official — as they walked in at the head of the line. After they took their seats, the heralds and

rumpeters stood to one side of them. As each chariot passed, the herald would call out the name of the owner, his father, and his city. The horses and riders followed the chariots, and the mares came after them. When the mule carts started through the gate, everyone began to laugh, for what did the first mule team do but stop short and refuse to budge, acting 'obstinate as mules.' The driver made a neat little circle over their heads with his whip, and they decided to move after all.



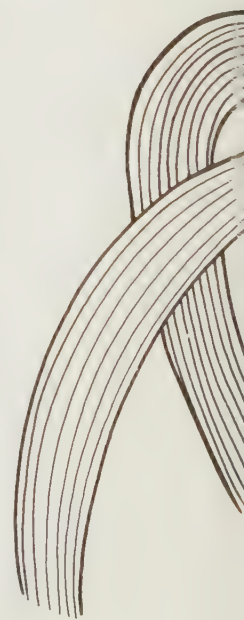
The procession wound around the hippodrome rather slowly; some of the charioteers stopped to wave at people they knew. Several of the owners of horses and chariots had set up small pavilions with canopies against the sun, but officials soon informed them that this was against the rules; they had to let the sun broil them just as it did everyone else! The drivers and riders tried to show their steeds off with particular care as they passed by the owners' seats. The procession more than filled the stadium; the first chariot had gone out





before the last mule-cart entered. Just after the final mule-cart passed out, the starting gates were put into place and the chariots began to maneuver into place behind them. You could hear the snap of the ropes in front of the stalls as they were pulled out, two by two, one on each side, until the horses were even. Then the trumpeter piped his signal, the bronze dolphin fell down from the altar in front of the center gates, the eagle rose in the air, and the race had begun. What a noise as they thundered down the dirt! There were only 18 chariots this year, not 25 as there were at the last Olympiad, but the whole stadium seemed to be a line of horses at the start. Then several teams began to pull out in front, and the line was no longer even. The first turn was rounded without any mishaps, and the second, but as the chariots began their next turn around the stadium, two in the center of the field skidded to a stop at the same time. I couldn't hear anything over the noise of the horses, but their wheels had caught, and one broke off. With great skill the driver of the other chariot steered away from the broken axle and headed back down the field. The driver of the damaged chariot jumped out and grabbed the first team as a groom ran up to lead them away, the chariot lurching behind on one wheel. Again the others turned the far post and headed back to the starting point. By now the white chitons of the drivers were no longer white, but a dusty light brown. Again they turned back. Then, at the far turn, two chariots went around at once, followed by three more. The closest of these to the center leaned too far toward the turning post, and the wheel's hub glanced against the post with a sharp crack. The chariot continued on for a moment, only to stagger to a stop as the axle split beneath the driver. At this point, the dust was so high that it was hard to see what was happening in the distance. The one other accident I saw was right in front of where we were standing. Two teams, one heading for the turning post, the other coming back from it, were suddenly on top of one another. One of the drivers must have been blinded by dust, for there was great surprise on the other's face as the black horses of the opposite team headed towards his grays. He pulled up on his reins with such force that the front two horses reared up as far as their traces let them. The first team still continued forward, so when the two rearing horses tried to come down, they landed on the others. The noise was horrible as the poor horses tried to get free of each other and of the traces of the other chariot. A groom ran out with a knife in his hand and began to cut them free, and more grooms led the horses and chariots off to one side. The rest of the field stayed on to the end, unlike some races I have heard of, where over half were disabled before the final goal was reached.

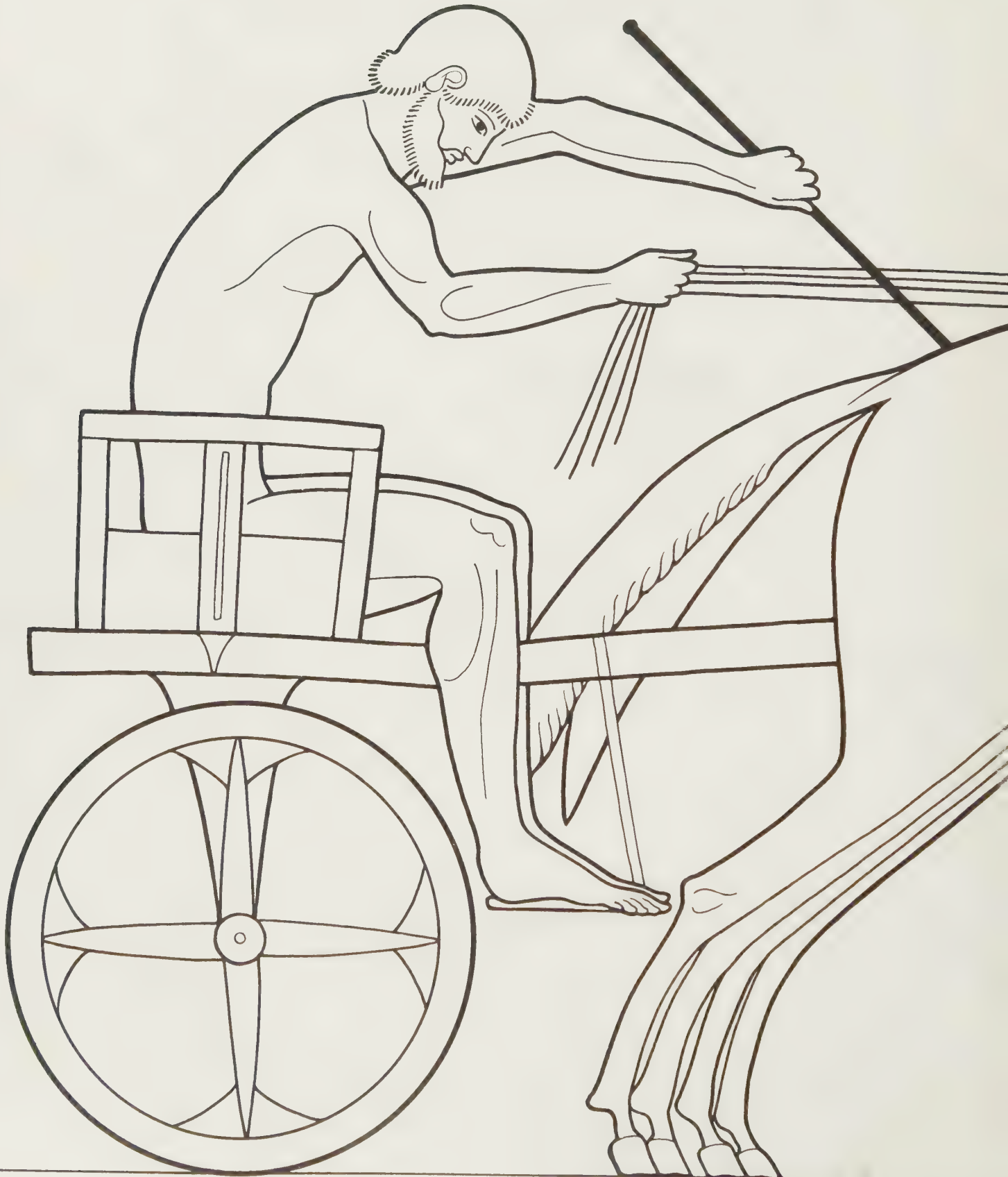
As the final lap began, the shouts of the crowd were deafening. I could see even the most dignified of the owners starting to jump up and down as the horses roared toward the finish. It was close. From where we stood, I couldn't even see which of the front three chariots had come in first. Then several burly men started to clear a way through the crowd, shouting, "Make way for the victor Hieron," and I knew that the tyrant of Syracuse owned the winning chariot. His horses won the horse race in the last Olympiad and the one before that. The Greek Judges walked over to wind the red woolen band around the head of the charioteer and to give the grooms bands for the horses; Hieron, of course, would get the olive wreath later.

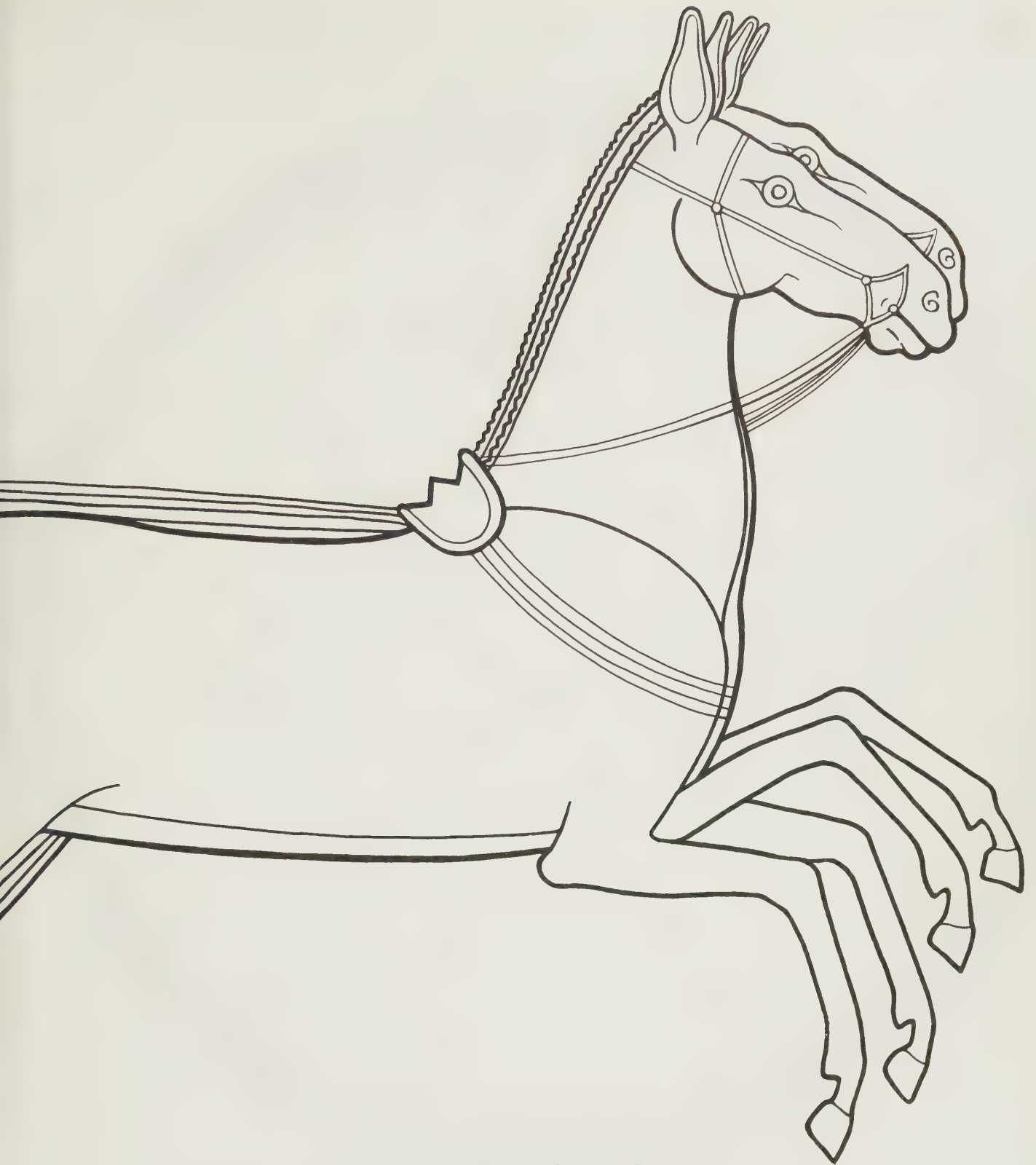


After the chariot race, I thought the horse-race would be anticlimactic, but by the time the beautiful horses had lined up to start, everyone was excited. Father and Uncle Timotheos were betting on the winner between themselves; father favored "Swiftly," Hieron of Syracuse's horse, while Uncle Timotheos liked "White-boots," from Argos, I forget who owned him. But neither one won; a beautiful chestnut belonging to Leophron of Boeotia came in first by almost a length. Then came the mare's race. Have you ever seen it, where the rider jumps off in the middle of the last half and runs beside the horse? I don't know if it is common, but I had never seen one. It takes a different sort of rider than the regular horse race. A small man is best, light on the horse, for the regular race, but the mare's race is best for a taller man who runs fast.

From a red-figure kylix by the Pentesilea painter, c. 460 B.C. Athens, Agora







When the mule-cart race began, the crowd was beginning to get smaller, since some people wanted to get good places for the pentathlon and others were hungry. We had brought olives and cheese, and we'd bought some small cakes from a vendor on the way to the hippodrome, so we didn't need to stop. There were ten mule-carts, all but three from the Peloponnese, but the victor was from Syracuse. The race was more exciting than I had expected; once they got going, the mules were fast and very strong. As soon as the victor was awarded his woolen band, we headed for the stadium.



On the way out of the hippodrome, we stopped to talk to Harpakrates of Megara, who had to fill my father in on what he had been doing since they fought the Persians together, twelve years ago. He went on and on, and when we arrived the lots had already been drawn for places in the first events of the pentathlon, and the first round of the foot-race was already about to begin. The winners of the six first heats gathered at the starting line quickly after the



last one had finished. Chaireption of Taras, who had just won the last lap, was the winner. I marvelled at his ability to win after he had just finished a round; he was hardly even puffing!

The jump with weights was done at one side of the main running track, so that when the ground was loosened for the jumpers it wouldn't give the runners a bad footing in the next race, but they could still use the same starting line for





From a red-figure kylix,
Museo Civico, Bologna;
early 5th century B. C.

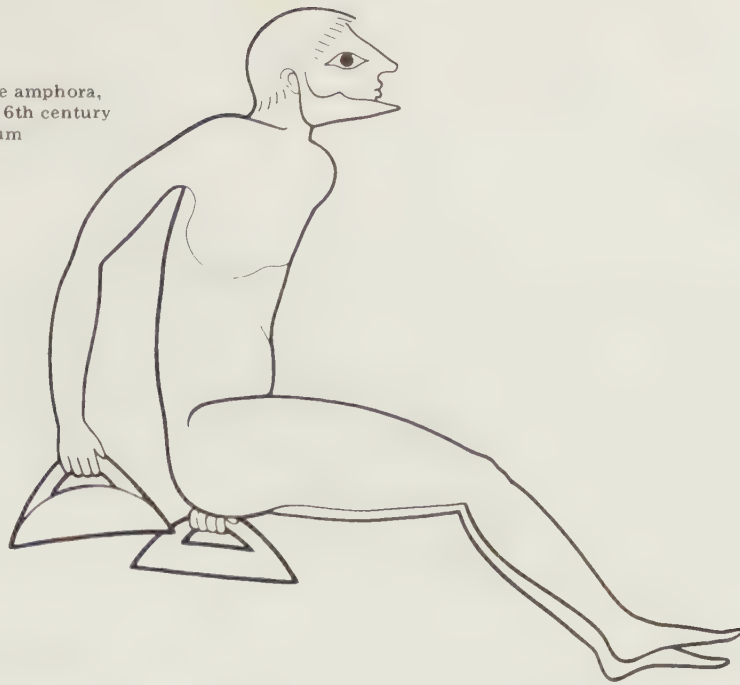


the discus and javelin throwers. Men with picks seemed to be everywhere, breaking up the hard ground. They made a long start-off area in front of the jumping-off line, and a very long pit for the jump. The athletes drew lots (you know that the same order is used for the jumping, the discus and the javelin throw), and Anaxander stepped up to the starting line. He seemed surprised by the size of the weights when he picked them up; perhaps he had not brought his own from Thera. After swinging them back and forth a few times, he seemed satisfied. The flute player began his rhythmic blowing, and Anaxander's jump was perfectly in cadence with the flute. The first jump seemed short, but he got better, and the fifth, the longest one, which was the one that counted, caused the crowd to cry out with admiration. None of the next five jumpers came close. Then Chaireption of Taras stepped up, the one who won the running. His well-oiled skin gleamed as he reached for the weights; he did seem to have the perfect pentathlete's body, not too muscular, as the wrestlers and boxers seem to be getting, but perfectly developed. His first jump came to



From a red-figure kylix, 480
B.C., Antikenmuseum, Basel

From a black-figure amphora,
2nd quarter of the 6th century
B.C. British Museum



within a few fingers of Anaxander's, and all the rest were ahead. It looked as if he would win, and no one came up to his mark until the next to the last, Agathokles of Sparta. His first jump was just up to Chaireption's, but his feet were not together as he landed, so the jump didn't count. The next one was good, but still short, but the final one had everyone staring; it was easily two feet beyond! The last jumper didn't come near it.

The men with their picks came out again to make the ground smooth and build up the starting mound for the discus-throwers. The three Olympic discuses were brought forward and one of the Greek Judges gave a short speech about their previous use and how he hoped the current athletes would do as well with them. You could see eyes going toward Archidamos of Miletus, who won the pentathlon last time and was particularly great with the discus. He won at Nemea and at the games at the Isthmus, too, but on his way to Delphi for the Pythian games a rockslide fell on his party on a steep path in the mountains, and his leg was broken, so he will not compete again.

Anaxander picked the first discus from the official's hands, spun around with it several times, as if to test the weight (do you remember how, when we were little, we used to pick up big, flat stones and throw them, pretending they were discuses?). Then he ran up to the starting line and threw the discus in a

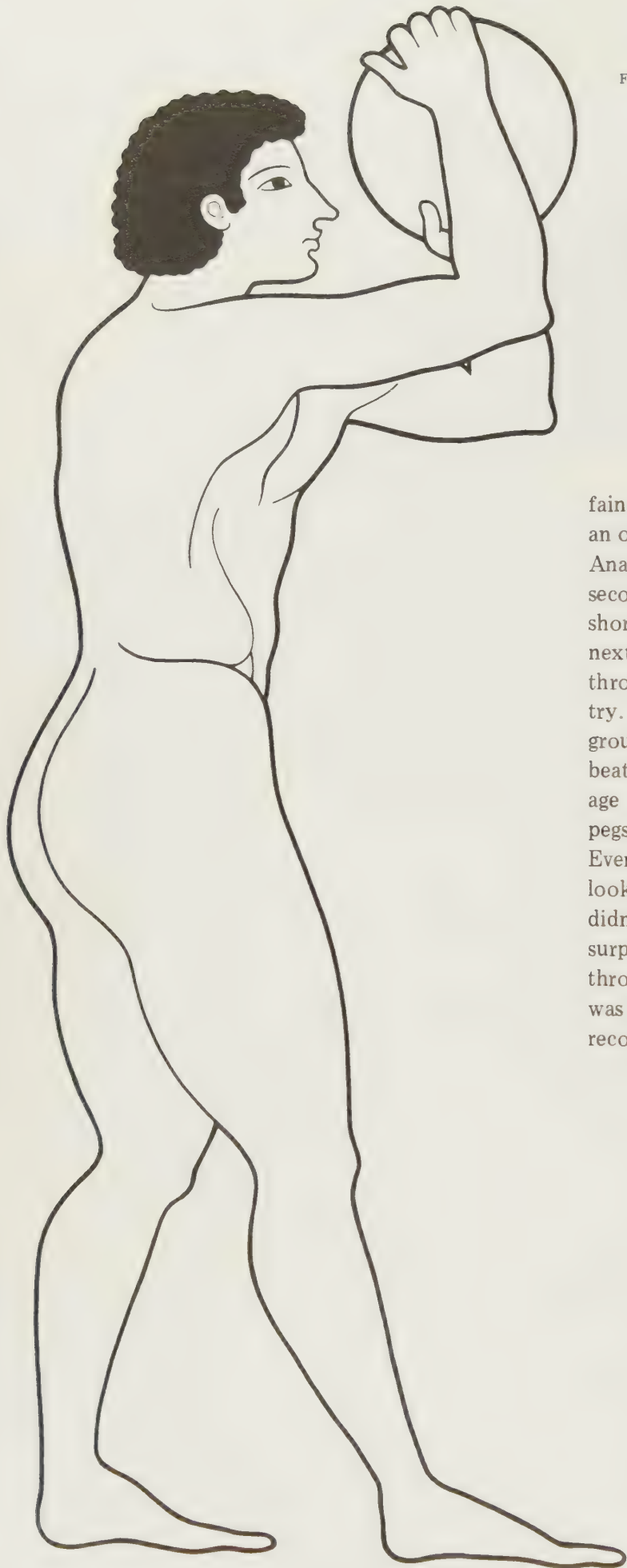
From a red-figure kylix,
Lecce, *Museo Provinciale*,
early 5th century B.C.





From a red-figure kylix, early 5th century B.C., Museum of Fine Arts, Boston





From a red-figure amphora by Euthymides,
late 6th century B.C. Munich

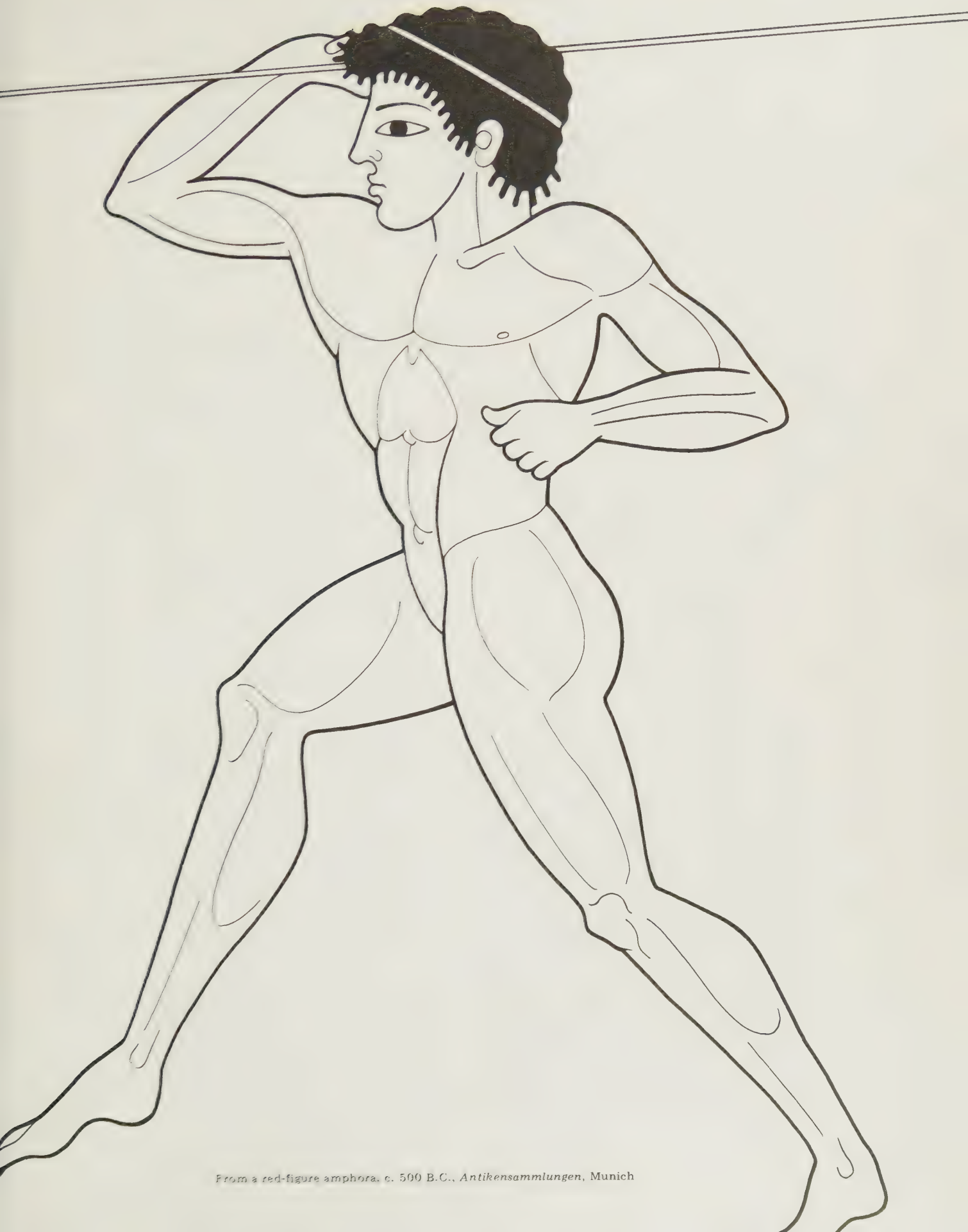
faintly curving line. Where it stopped, an official put a peg marked with an A, Anaxander's lot, into the ground. His second throw was short, the third shorter still. Chaireption of Taras was next; he went past Anaxander's first throw by several feet on his second try. After Chaireption came a large group of "almosts;" they just about beat the mark, but didn't quite manage it. The field was scattered with pegs all at practically the same spot. Even Agathokles of Sparta, who looked like one of the top contenders, didn't go beyond. But the last throw surprised everyone, including the thrower, Euphronios of Corinth. It was a good eight fingers beyond the record of Chaireption.



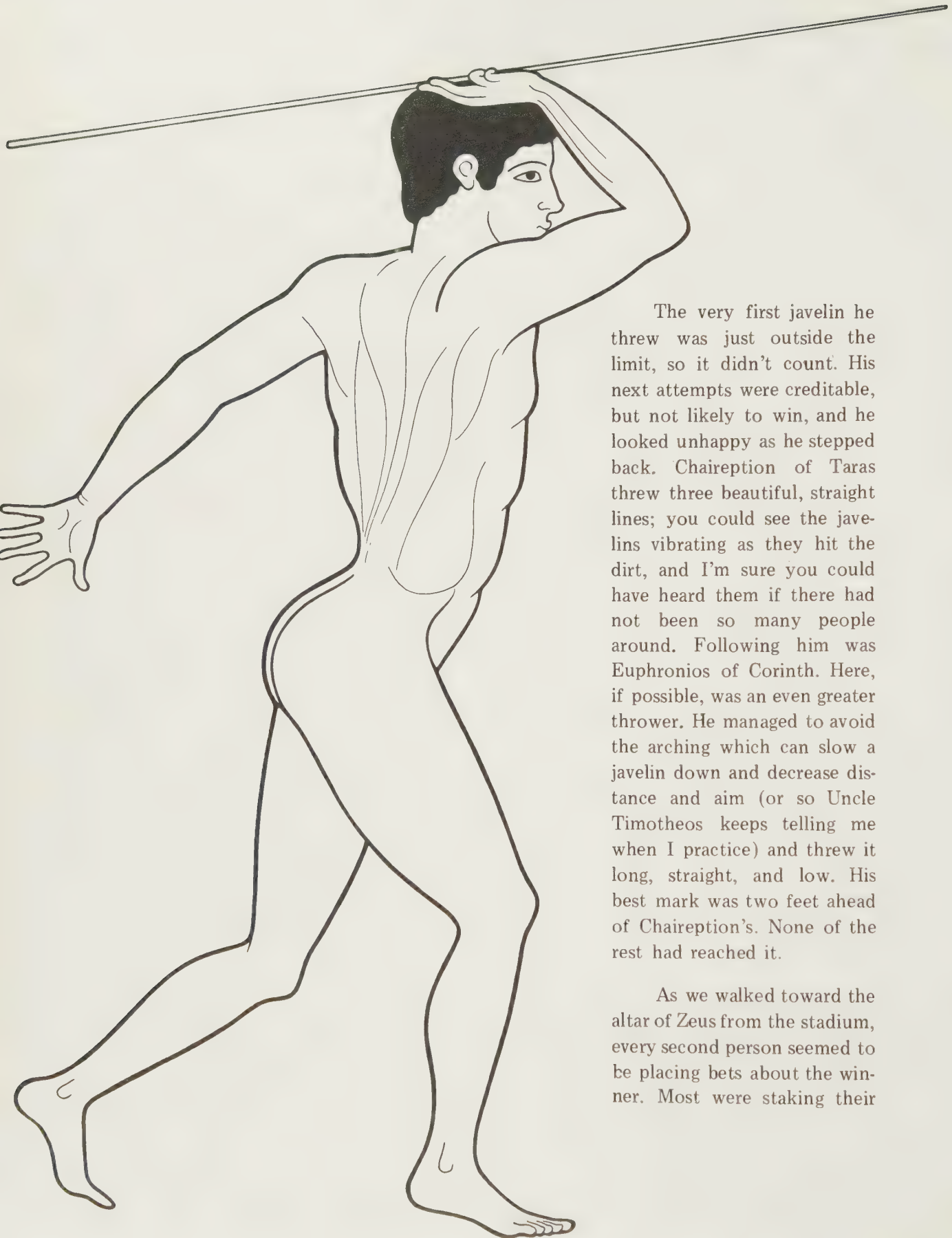
From a red-figure amphora, early 5th century B.C., *Antikensammlungen*, Munich



No sooner was the last discus thrown and the decision announced than the pegs were pulled out and men with picks worked on the ground where the discuses had fallen. This time they only left a narrow strip to mark the area where the javelin had to go; the side, which had been loosened for the jumping and the discus, was trampled down by many feet, until it was almost as smooth as the rest of the stadium. Anaxander came up to the starting line for his first throw. His trainer stood beside him, checking to see that the throwing thong was correctly positioned.



From a red-figure amphora, c. 500 B.C., Antikensammlungen, Munich



The very first javelin he threw was just outside the limit, so it didn't count. His next attempts were creditable, but not likely to win, and he looked unhappy as he stepped back. Chaireption of Taras threw three beautiful, straight lines; you could see the javelins vibrating as they hit the dirt, and I'm sure you could have heard them if there had not been so many people around. Following him was Euphronios of Corinth. Here, if possible, was an even greater thrower. He managed to avoid the arching which can slow a javelin down and decrease distance and aim (or so Uncle Timotheos keeps telling me when I practice) and threw it long, straight, and low. His best mark was two feet ahead of Chaireption's. None of the rest had reached it.

As we walked toward the altar of Zeus from the stadium, every second person seemed to be placing bets about the winner. Most were staking their



bets on Euphronios of Corinth or on Chaireption of Taras, who had one win and two seconds, but some chose Agathokles of Sparta, since he had come in third in two events and had defeated Chaireption in one. The finalists walked to the altar before heading to the pit, to say a prayer to Zeus for victory. Then they turned back to where the Greek Judges stood and drew their lots. The first two were Chaireption and Euphronios. Their trainers supervised their servants in oiling their bodies and then dusting them with fine dust. They stood facing one another, both magnificent specimens of manhood, perfectly trained. Quickly they began to struggle, first this way, then that. Suddenly both slid down to the ground, and the judge commanded them to stand up and start again. Then, when I was beginning to think that one would never overcome the other, Chaireption managed to grasp Euphronios from behind the neck and brought his knee to the ground, a fall. They rested a moment before beginning again. This time Euphronios was very fast in bringing Chaireption to a fall; he grabbed him around the waist and turned him over to the ground. The next session was as long as the first, but again Chaireption caught his opponent from the back and forced his knee down. Now the crowd was abuzz with speculation about the next round, because if Chaireption won, he would win the pentathlon then and there. The two looked at each other for a long time before

starting. Then it appeared that Euphronios had Chaireption down, but he strained every muscle I could see to bring himself upright. They moved to the edge of the pit, and seemed likely to go beyond it, when, with a series of grunts, Chaireption leaned over Euphronios' leg, pulling on his shoulder at the same time, and brought him to the ground with a thud. There was a short silence before the judge's signal indicated that he was the winner; then the crowd went wild, shouting and throwing flowers and laurel leaves.



From a stone base c. 500 B.C., National Museum, Athens

As the sun was setting, the funeral rites for the hero Pelops began. It grew dark quickly, and the black ram was led to the altar by the light of torches. The fire on the altar flickered as the blood of the ram was poured on, then smouldered as the rest of the ram was burnt, its rich smoke rising to nourish the dead hero. Every face was solemn as the torch light hit it, and the entire audience joined in the sober chants. Many cities' emissaries went up to the altar to pour libations of wine on behalf of their people. The chants were still continuing when we



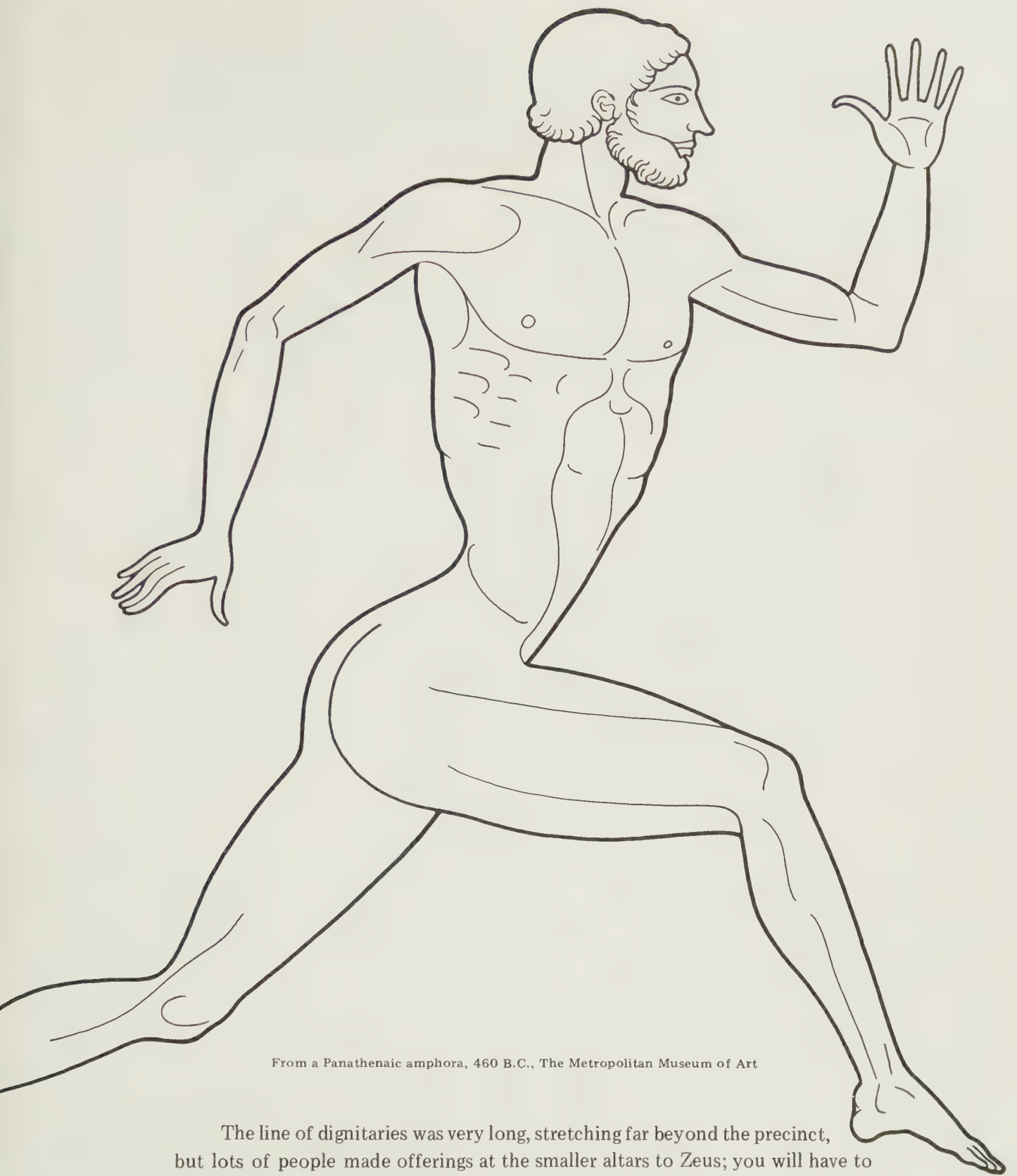


left, just as the full moon came up and drove away the shadows around the tomb. We dined that night in the tent of a fellow-citizen of Leophron, the victor in the horse race. He was celebrating the victory as though it had been his own, with toasts and songs, many old, one written just for this victory. The party was still very merry when we left, long after midnight. Out on the river, the barges of Hieron of Syracuse were echoing with song and laughter almost until dawn.

I don't know how all the celebrators managed to get up the next morning, but every person of importance was awake at dawn to join the sacred procession to the altar of Zeus. I've seen lots of processions in Athens, but this one, I think, will stand out in my mind as one of the greatest I've been to. It's no easy thing to organize 100 oxen and several thousand people into a solemn and dignified group, but the men of Elis did it.

The altar of Zeus, as you have probably heard, is about twice as tall as I am, but it is completely made of ashes from the hearth of Hestia, mixed with water from the river. The hundred oxen offered to Zeus by the people of Elis went to the altar first, and their thighs were burned on the altar-top to nourish the god. Then came delegates from cities; they had put aside their petty bickering over position in the procession. More animals were given to the god, and splendid pots and pitchers, some of gold and silver, were used to pour offerings of wine. My father said that the most precious would probably go back to the treasure-houses by the hill of Kronos.



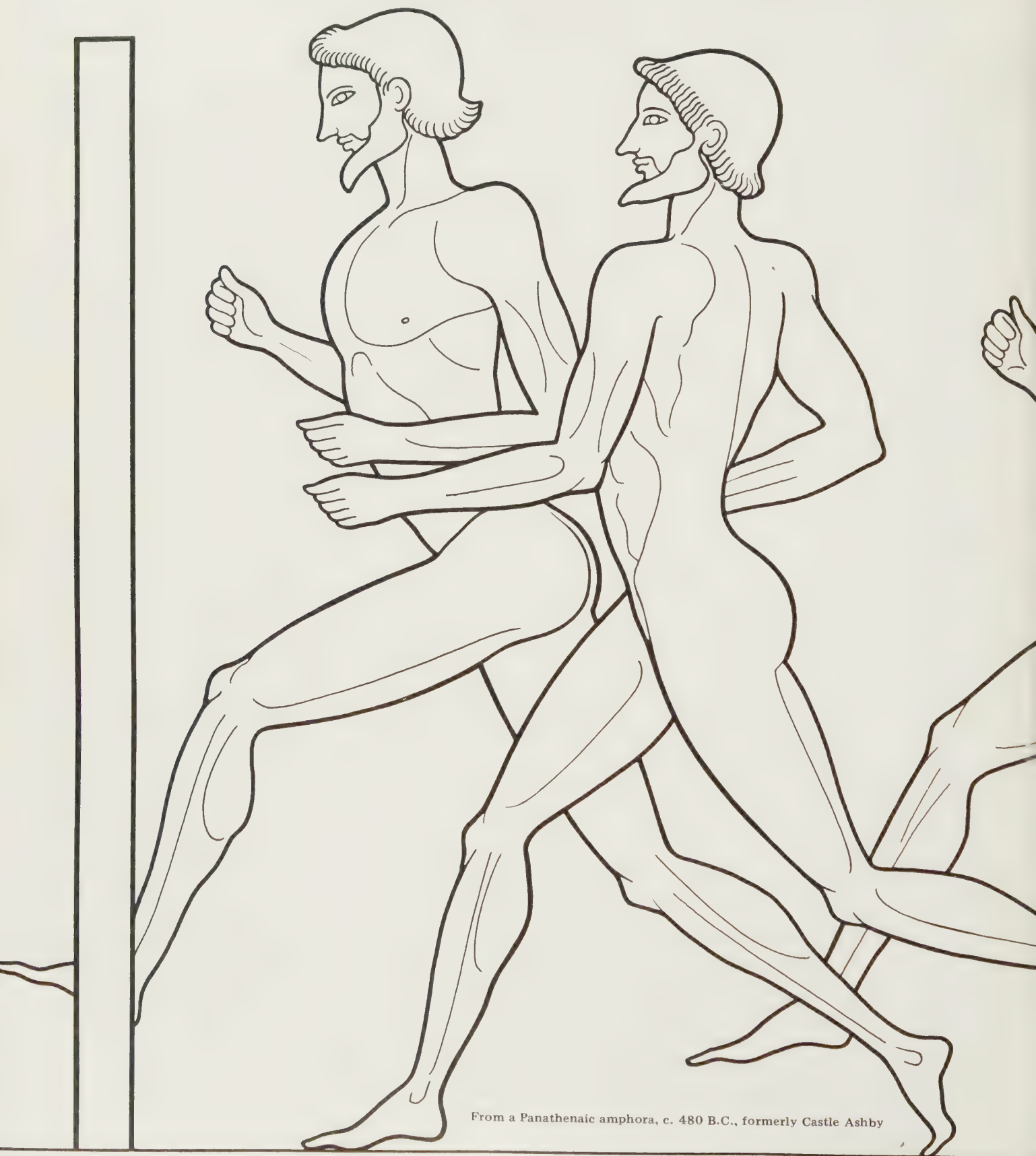


From a Panathenaic amphora, 460 B.C., The Metropolitan Museum of Art

The line of dignitaries was very long, stretching far beyond the precinct, but lots of people made offerings at the smaller altars to Zeus; you will have to go to Olympia to see how many of these there are. The smoke from the high altar at times covered the entire precinct, until wind came along to clear it off.

By midday the last sacrifice had been offered, the flutes had stopped playing, and the crowds had departed, but the smoke continued to drift toward the stadium as we went to see the running. I was particularly interested in

seeing the stade-race, since I hope to run in it as soon as I'm accepted into the men's class. The field was very large, with ten beginning heats. They were run in rapid succession, more quickly, I think, than the boys' races, perhaps because the supervisors were more accustomed to what they were doing. After



From a Panathenaic amphora, c. 480 B.C., formerly Castle Ashby

all, they are just citizens of Elis who take on this task for the games, and only a few will repeat the duty, so it takes them a while to get into the swing of it.

The winner of the stade-race, once down the stadium, was Parmenides of Poseidonia. He kept his red woolen band on his head during the double-length



race. Luckily for him, his first heat was the third, so he had a chance to catch his breath. He looked just as good in the double-length race as in the stade race, and sure enough, he won a second victory. What a triumph! I know it has been done before many times, for the races are not so different. They say it happened in the 73rd and 74th Olympiads, and more besides. Still, he will have great honor in Poseidonia, where I hear that they grant gifts to Olympic victors as well as feeding them at public expense for life the way they do in Athens.

Diomedes of Sparta won the long-distance race. Since the Spartans pride themselves on their ability to live long on little, I suppose that was appropriate. I, of course, was cheering for Evandros, who comes from a small town in Attica. He is from a farm family, much poorer than most of the families whose sons and men compete, and it would have been a great boon for him to have the food and money Athens gives to victors.

The wrestling was all very good, especially after the first rounds. Most falls came in a short time, without the endless back-and-forth maneuvering we saw in the pentathlon. Probably that was because these were all wrestlers, not men who had to excel at four other things as well. The next-to-last round was particularly exciting, with Epharmostos of Opous (who was the victor) fighting Lygdamos of Ephesus. Each had taken two falls; the sun was so hot that there couldn't have been any dust left on their bodies, so each had trouble grasping the other, or holding the slippery skin. At one point Lygdamos had Epharmostos almost upside down, feet in the air, but Epharmostos wouldn't let go of his opponent. Suddenly he gave a great swing of his legs, turned upright, and in a flash had Lygdamos by the back of the neck. From there, he brought his knee to the ground, the fall was judged fair, and the crowd roared its approval.





From a red-figure kylix, late 6th century B.C., British Museum



Many of the boxers seemed heavier and generally bigger than those I've seen in Athens. The larger men were a bit slower, but gave their opponents strong resistance. Before they began, the judges inspected their handlacings very carefully for possible sharp objects or unusually hard leather. I have never heard of anyone cheating in the Olympic games, but there are stories about other boxing matches where it happens.

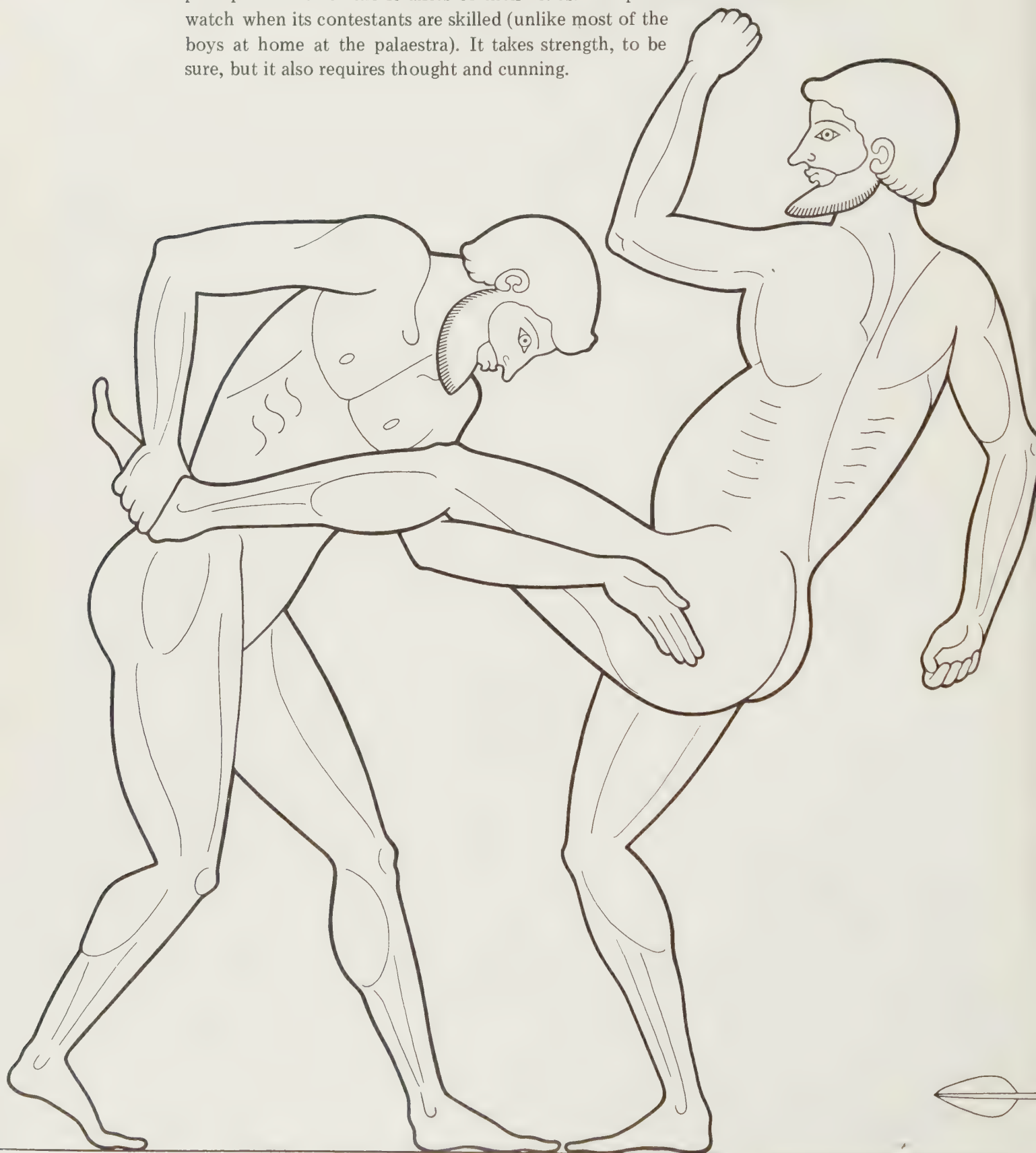
In the first round of matches, Uncle Timotheos jokingly said that he thought he was watching the stade-race, not the boxing, so far out of their pits did the boxers roam. One, punching first with one hand, then the other, practically chased his opponent all the way down the field, until he had the same tactics applied to him in the other direction. Back in the pit, though, they put an end to their sauntering and boxed in earnest; it was not long before the loser raised his finger in defeat. The victor was Menalkes, from Opous like Epharmostos — that must be a town of powerful men!



From a red-figure fragment, c. 490 B.C.,
formerly Berlin, *Staatliche Museen*

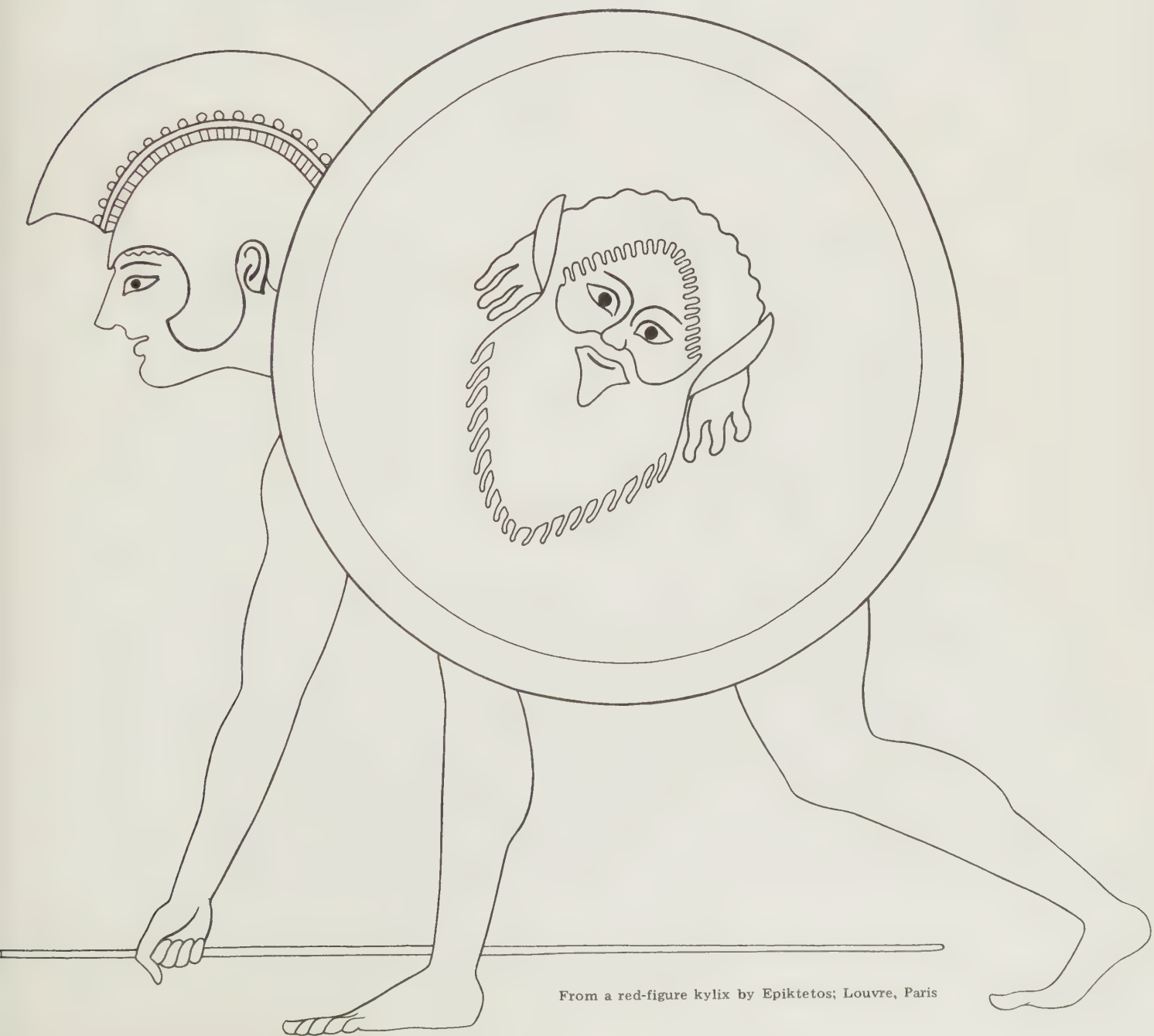


The pankration caught the full attention of the crowd, which had been large for the wrestling, then dwindled for the boxing. The most notable rivalry was between Epitimadas of Argos, who was the victor, and Pandaros of Sparta, perhaps because of the rivalries of their cities. The pankration is wonderful to watch when its contestants are skilled (unlike most of the boys at home at the palaestra). It takes strength, to be sure, but it also requires thought and cunning.

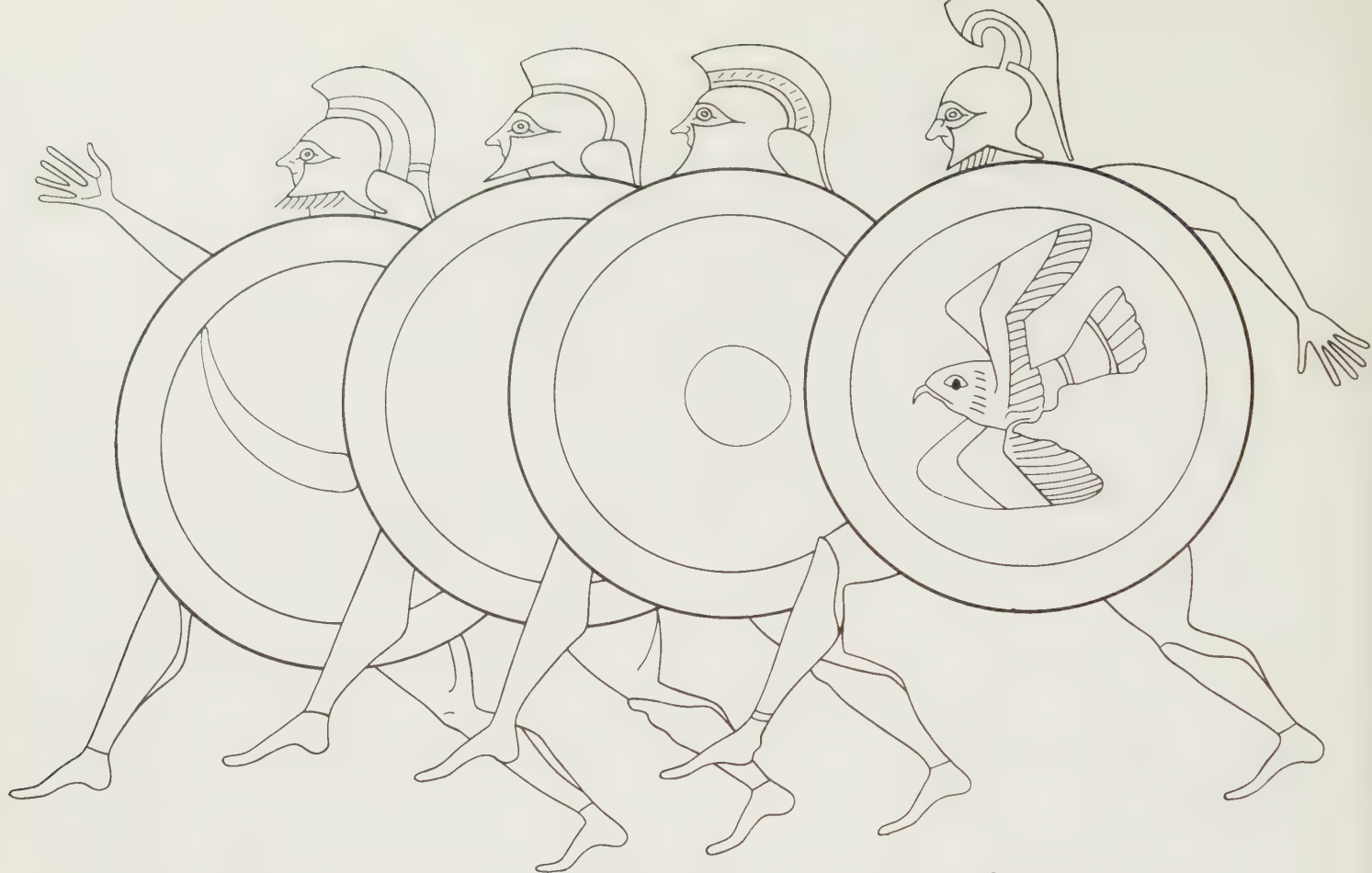


From a Panathenaic amphora, 5th century B.C. The Metropolitan Museum of Art

The sun was hovering just above the mountains when the pankration was done, the pit smoothed out, and the race-in-armor announced. There were 23 runners, each with a shield from the special set which is left at Olympia all the time so that there can be no variation in weight. The runners did seem to have brought their own helmets and spears, and that kept them from looking like so many olives in a pot. The lots for places were drawn from one helmet; afterwards, its owner put it back on his head. The speed of the armed runners was quite different from that of the double-length runners, even though the distance is the same; these men had to watch their heavy shields, and their helmets must have bumped up and down on their heads as they ran. I think it is good preparation for war, and it is supposed to be included in the games to remind us all that that is one of the reasons for having games. Eupalos of Athens won, a fellow-countryman! We will have a great celebration when we return with our olive wreaths.



From a red-figure kylix by Epiktetos; Louvre, Paris

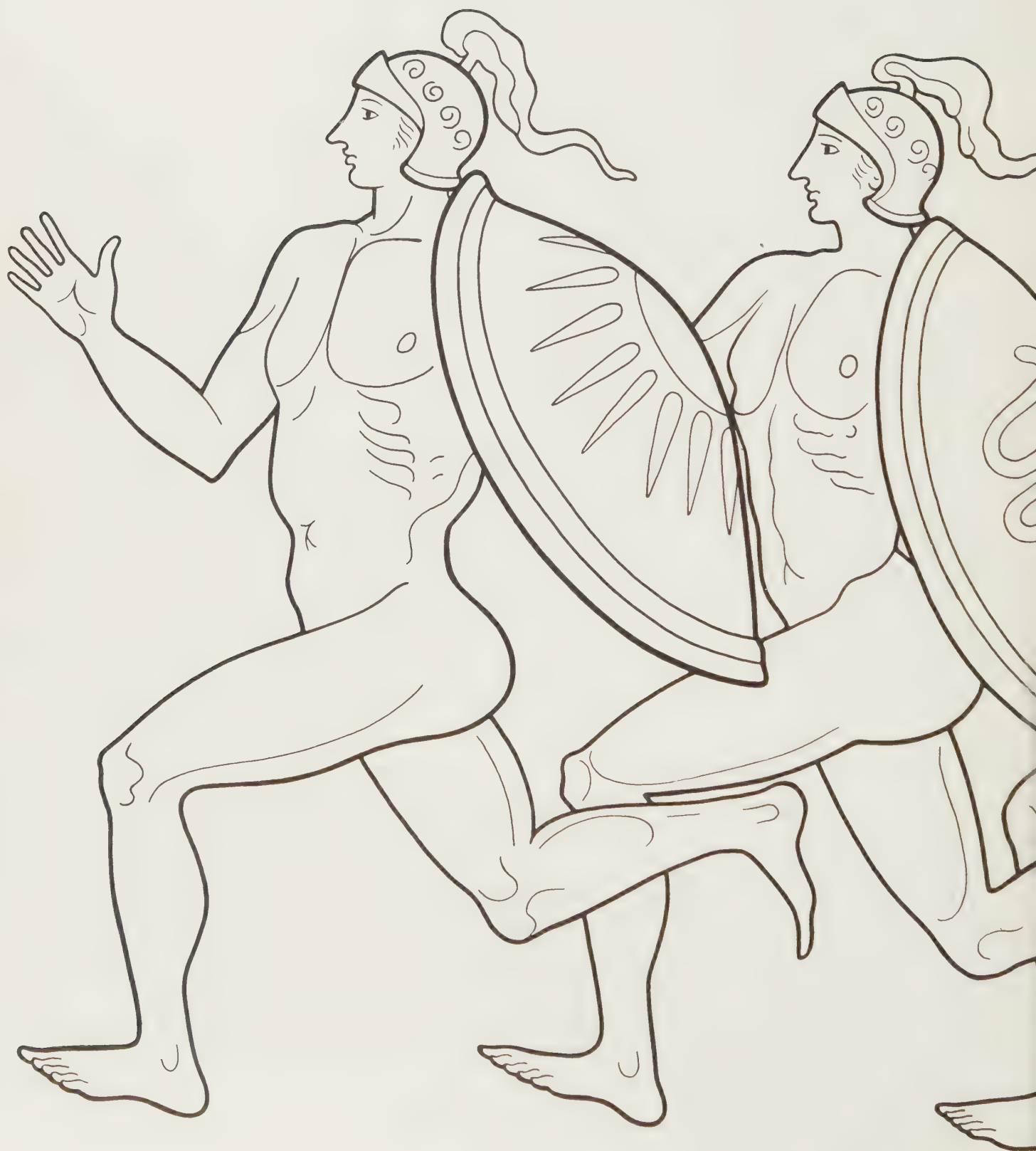


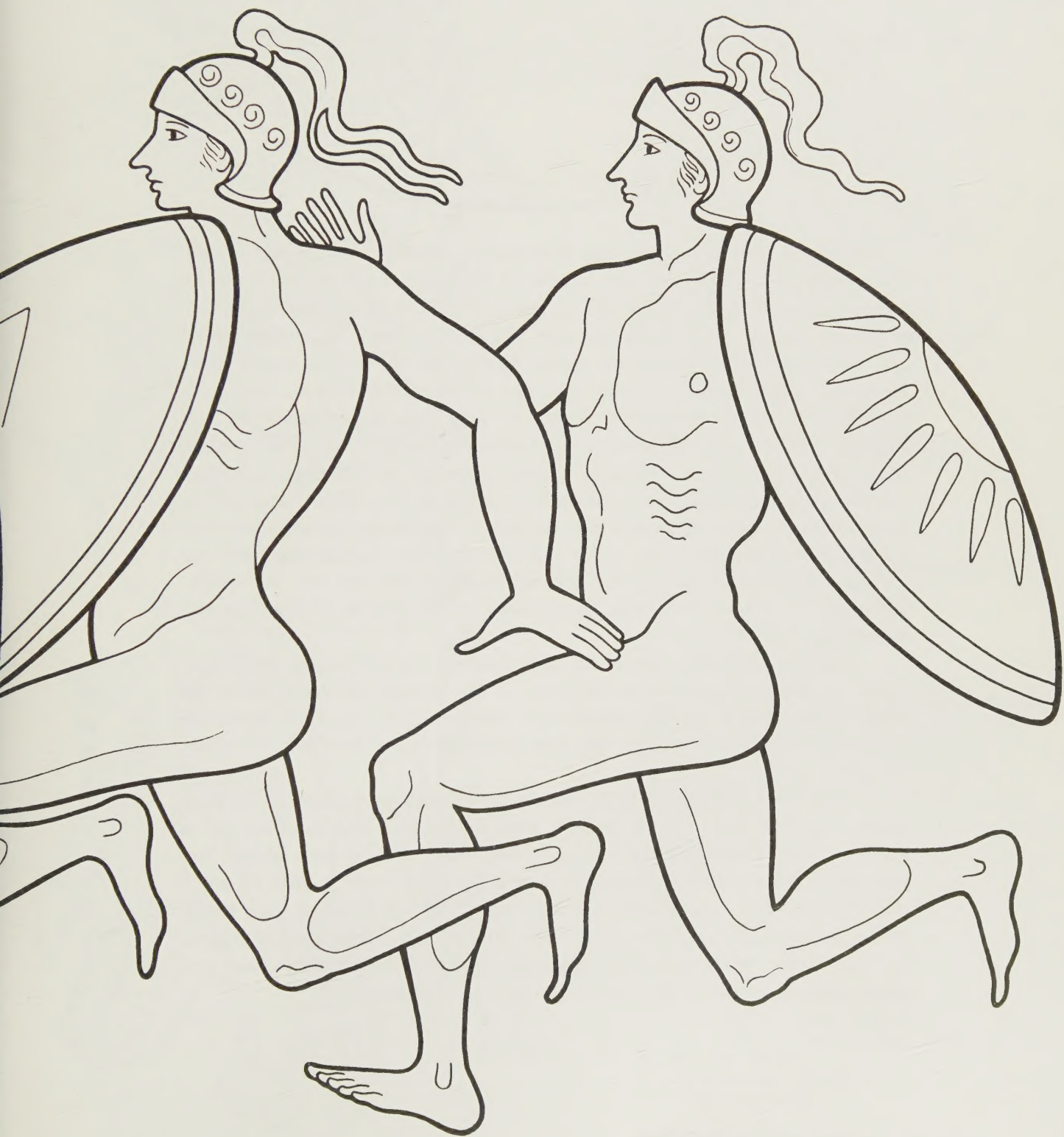
At night we were invited to no fewer than four parties, and my father thought it courteous to stop at each. We had our olives at the tent of Periander of Argos, our bread and vegetables with Lysippos of Corinth, and an excellent stew of rabbit with Eupalos of Athens. Our final stop, with Simonides of Samos, was a long walk from the rest; the host was giving shelter to the philosopher Anaxagoras, and he had insisted on more quiet than could be found near the sanctuary. They were engaged in a serious conversation when we entered, and after greeting us and having our hands washed and seeing us served, the host began again . . . well, I won't bother, dear Nikosthenes, with the details. It was quite fascinating, but several times I almost fell asleep after all that food and wine and a day in the sun.

My olive wreath — you will see it when you come to Athens, but it will be in the temple of Athena by then, and probably dried to powder — was put on my head by the head of the Greek Judges. That was on the next day, the last. We victors walked at the head of the procession to the altar, and the Greek Judges and important people from each city and lesser officials followed behind. A libation was given to Zeus, and incense was heaped on the altar. Then we stood in a row in front of the altar, and each stepped forward when his name was announced by the herald. The wreaths were made each from a single branch of the sacred olive, cut with gold shears by a boy whose parents are both alive. They were piled on an old iron tripod, but I have heard that the people of Elis plan to commission a table of gold and ivory to hold them.



After the ceremony we were besieged by well-wishers, including many from Athens I hadn't known were there. I persuaded my father to go to the bathing pool, where we were able to cool off in the water, although the sun had made it rather warm. Uncle Timotheos had refused to let me swim in the river because of the garbage being put into it by all the barges and boats (he is something of a health nut, you know). Lots of people were swimming there, but he told dire tales of sickness caused by swimming in the river when he competed at Olympia.







While we were waiting for the state dinner at mid-day, we walked around the foundations of the great new temple of Zeus, which will probably not be complete even by the next Olympiad. Three columns were standing, and a row of drums marked the places for the rest. The builders' work had stopped short and been cleaned up before the games began, but there were several large blocks of stone standing at one side, one of them marked with the rough outlines of a column drum. How I hope to come back to Olympia when it is finished! The statue which used to stand where the new temple is being built, of Eutelidas the Spartan, who won the pentathlon in the 38th Olympiad (that was the only time there was a pentathlon for boys) had been moved to the south of the temple. How stiff and wooden it looked! The recent statues of victors seemed almost ready to go out and join the games, they were so lifelike. Euthymus of Locri, who won the boxing in the last two Olympiads, dedicated a statue just yesterday. It was made by Pythagoras of Rhegium and looked quite real.

The state dinner for victors and their families was held in the presidents' house. It was cool, in spite of the heat, in the breezy colonnade where we dined. The officials of Elis served us a fine feast; we ate meat from the sacrificial oxen, and then the rest was served to many hundreds of others outside.

I have been writing this as the games went along, and tonight, if my lamp doesn't run out of oil (don't laugh — even in this land rich in olives, oil is precious. The officials may give it to competitors to use on their bodies, but they won't spare a drop for a lamp) I will make a fair copy. It must be given tomorrow morning to Demetrios of your town, who will have it in your hands before we reach Athens, if the winds blow fairly on him. Please give my regards to your father, with wishes for improving health, and to your mother and sisters. And remember, you promised to come to Athens soon.

Your cousin,

Lykophron

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Evil in *Tales
of Great
DRAGONS.*



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